

EXHIBITION NOTES

NEW WESTERN DIRECTIONS:

JOAN MYERS

JAPANESE RELOCATION CAMPS: A PHOTOGRAPHIC SERIES

April 18-May 31, 1987
Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art
Utah State University
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The Museum's series entitled New Western Directions is intended to visually examine the aesthetic sensibility of the "New West." The concept of a "New West"—often the subject of futurologists, economists, political analysts, and other commentators on contemporary trends—describes, in general, the rapid population growth and economic development of the southern west states of Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, and Utah. The accelerated growth in these states has been instrumental in inducing broad cultural, political, and economic realignments. From an artistic viewpoint, the exhibition series New Western Directions, addresses the role of the visual arts as both a reflection of and participant in these social phenomena. Hopefully, the works on exhibit will question our assumptions about what "western art" is, as well as beg the question as to the ambiguousness of such a category.

JAPANESE RELOCATION CAMP SERIES

In the Spring of 1942, the United States began the removal and internment of 110,000 of its residents, two-thirds of them American citizens. These Japanese-Americans were not guilty of any crime and were not individually interrogated; yet, because of their ancestry, they spent the next one to three years in concentration camps located in some of the harshest and most desolate areas of the country.

From 1983 to 1985, I photographed the remains of the ten Relocation Camps. I traveled to Idaho, Wyoming, California, Colorado, the salt flats of Utah, the desert of Arizona, and the swamps of Arkansas. Today, some of these sites have been cultivated for farmland, but most are nearly as inhospitable as they were forty years ago. The hastily constructed buildings and sentry towers are gone, but extremes of temperatures, clouds of dust, and poisonous snakes abound.

With my 4 x 5 view camera, I recorded the details of individual lives—the few surviving army barracks buildings, foundations of mess halls and latrines, names drawn in concrete, the remains of small gardens lovingly built to soften the harsh and impersonal environment. I collected and photographed the rusty and weathered objects scattered over the sites—bits of Oriental china, handmade tools, special smooth stones for walks and gardens, children's toys—artifacts of daily life.

Photography is for me a tool for exploration, for personal interaction with a reality. What remains in these barren windswept places and what I chose to photograph is the imprint left from thousands of lives, hopes, and dreams.

—Joan Myers

LIST OF WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

1. Spoon and China, 1984
2. Handle and Nails, 1984
- 3. Badge, 1984
4. Tin Hole Patches, 1984
5. Tricycle, 1985
6. Flyswatter, 1985
7. Paintbrush, 1984
- 8. Heart Mountain (Potato Cellar), 1984
9. Topaz, Utah (Baseball Backdrop), 1984
10. Amache, Colorado (Shower Stall), 1984
11. Tule lake, California (Mt. Shasta), 1984
12. Minidoka, Idaho
- 13. Topaz, Utah (Victory Garden), 1984
14. Manzanar, California (Guard Tower Footings), 1984
- 15. Topaz, Utah (Sewer Cover), 1984
- 16. Gila River, Arizona, 1984
17. Amache, Colorado (Hospital), 1984
18. Army Boot, 1985
19. China Shards, 1984
- 20. License Plate, 1984
21. Geta (Sandle), 1984
22. Doll, 1985
23. Bottle, 1985
- 24. Metal Artifacts, 1984
25. Pan and Cup, 1985
26. Nail Polish, 1985
27. Toy Car, 1984
28. Silverware, 1985
29. Manzanar, California (Garden), 1984
- 30. Amache, Colorado (Foundation), 1985
31. Jerome, Arkansas (Smokestack), 1985
32. Heart Mountain, Wyoming (Hospital), 1984
33. Gila River, Arizona (Garden), 1985
- 34. Heart Mountain, Wyoming (Memorial Steps), 1984
35. Manzanar, California (Bamboo), 1984
- 36. Amache, Colorado (Gravestone), 1984
37. Poston, Arizona (Sewage Plant), 1985
- 38. Poston, Arizona, 1985
- 39. Rohwer, Arkansas (Pet Grave), 1984
- 40. Topaz, Utah (Stove Pipes), 1984
- 41. Manzanar, California (Entry Station), 1984

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